Voting in Primary Elections

What is a primary? In a primary election, voters select which candidates will appear on the ballot for a given political party in the general election in November. For example, the winner of a Democratic Party primary will be that party's nominee on the general election ballot in November.

See here for a helpful, informational video about primaries from the Wake County Board of Elections.

Who can vote? Voters who are registered with one of the five recognized political parties (Constitution, Democratic, Green, Libertarian, or Republican) may only cast a ballot in that party's primary election. Unaffiliated voters may request a Democratic, Libertarian, *or* Republican ballot, or nonpartisan ballot, if available. Unaffiliated voters may *not* vote ballots of the Constitution or Green parties, as those parties conduct closed primaries.

Can 17-year-olds vote in the primary? 17-year-olds who will be 18 by Election Day (November 3, 2020) may also vote in the primary. However, they may receive a different ballot style because they are not eligible to vote in certain contests, such as referendums, that will not appear on the November ballot.

Do I need a photo ID to vote in the 2020 primary? No. In a December 31 order, a federal district court blocked North Carolina's voter photo ID requirement from taking effect. The injunction will remain in place until further order of the court. The North Carolina Court of Appeals also temporarily blocked the law on February 18, 2020.

Absentee By-Mail Voting

Deadline to request an absentee ballot by mail from the county board of elections: **February 25, 2020**

Deadline to Return Ballot: The voted ballot must be returned in person or by mail to the county board of elections no later than **5 p.m. on Election Day (March 3, 2020)**. Absentee ballots received after 5 p.m. on Election Day will be timely only if they are received by mail no later than 5 p.m. on the third day following the date of the election (March 6, 2020) and postmarked on or before Election Day.

For more information on absentee voting, please view the State Board's How to Vote Absentee by Mail one pager.

Early Voting

Dates: **February 13 – February 29**
To find all early voting sites and schedules in your county, go here: vt.ncsbe.gov/ossite.

For a PDF of early voting sites and schedules by county, go here:
https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/One-Stop_Early_Voting/One-Stop%20Site%20List.pdf

Early voting offers same-day registration, which allows eligible individuals to register to vote and cast a ballot on the same day. For voters who missed the regular voter registration deadline on February 7, early voting is the last chance to register and vote in the 2020 primary election.

Can I change my party affiliation during early voting? No. During the early voting period, registered voters may update their name or address, but may not change their party affiliation.

Absentee Voting Statistics

The State Board publishes absentee statistics daily here. Absentee data for this election is here.

Sample Ballots

Sample ballots are available for all eligible voters through the Voter Search tool at NCSBE.gov. Enter your first and last names in the boxes and click "Search." Click on your name from the list of available records. There, you will find your sample ballot(s), Election Day polling place, voting jurisdictions, voter history (which NC elections you've voted in), and information about any absentee ballot requests.

For the 2020 primary, unaffiliated voters will see sample ballots for the Republican, Democratic, and Libertarian parties, and if available, a nonpartisan ballot.

Primary Election Day

Date: **March 3**. Polls are open from **6:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.** Voters in line at 7:30 p.m. will be able to vote.

Find your polling place: To find your Election Day polling place, go here: vt.ncsbe.gov/PPLkup. You can search either by your residence or voting precinct.

Phones in the polling place

Can I use my cell phone at my polling place? Under § 163-166.3, taking photographs of voted ballots is prohibited. Voters are allowed to have phones or electronic devices with them while voting as long as those devices are not used to photograph a ballot or communicate with anyone via voice, text, email or any other method.

Voters, especially younger or first-time voters, may not know that it is illegal to photograph their ballot or that they are not permitted to communicate using an electronic device while in the act of voting. Photographing a marked ballot is against the law in part because such photographs could be used as proof of a vote for a candidate in a vote-buying scheme. Electronic communication while voting is prohibited because of limits on voter assistance and to prevent disruptions in the voting enclosure.

Voters may bring voting guides, notes and other materials into the voting booth. They also may use electronic devices to access a slate card or candidate information, provided they don't use a device to communicate with anyone.

Extending Polling Hours

Under § 163-166.01, the State Board of Elections may only extend voting on Election Day if the polls are "delayed in opening for more than 15 minutes, or are interrupted for more than 15 minutes after opening." Any extension may only be for a number of minutes equal to the disruption at that polling place. The appointed State Board will be on standby on Election Day to consider any extension recommended by a county board of elections.

Election Night Results

Results will post after polls close on election night here: https://er.ncsbe.gov/.

As of 2018, for security purposes, North Carolina does not allow counties to send in results via modem, so it may take some time for results to appear online. After poll workers close the polls, they must

physically return results media to their county board of elections office for entering into an air-gapped computer with the results-tabulation software.

A link to the 03/03/2020 election will be available soon in the dropdown menu. The media results file is here: https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/ENRS/2020_03_03/results_pct_20200303.zip.

Recounts

The state statute on recounts is § 163-182.7. Ordering recounts.

Second Primary?

The second primary statute is § 163-111. The candidate who receives the second-highest vote total in a primary contest may demand a second primary if no candidate receives more than 30 percent of the votes cast for all candidates in that contest. The top two vote-getters would be on the ballot for the second primary. *There is no second primary for presidential contests.*

A candidate who is apparently eligible to demand a second primary, according to unofficial results, must file a written request with the executive director of the State Board of Elections by noon on the ninth day after the primary, or **Thursday, March 12, 2020**. Any request would be subject to the certification of official results by the State Board. Requests for a second primary from candidates for state senator or state representative in a single-county district or candidates for county offices must be submitted to the appropriate county board of elections.

If no federal contest requires a second primary, the second primary would be held **April 21, 2020**. If any federal contest requires a second primary, the second primary for all contests would be held **May 12, 2020**.

Voting Systems

What voting systems are used in my county? In the March 2020 election, all North Carolina voters will use paper ballots, either marked by hand or by a ballot-marking device. To find your county's system, visit the voting systems maps at https://s3.amazonaws.com/dl.ncsbe.gov/Voting_Systems_Docs/VotingSystems_ByCounty.pdf. Some counties are using new voting systems in 2020.

Election Security

For information on election security in North Carolina, go here. For 10 Facts About Election Security in North Carolina, go here.